

CLAIM AMENDMENTS

1. (currently amended) A molding method comprising the steps of:

drawing a plastic hollow preform through a mold passage formed in a closed mold by applying a generally constant suction to a downstream end of a conduit having an upstream end connected to an output end of the mold passage; and

varying a flow cross section of the conduit between its upstream and downstream ends ~~so as to vary~~ and thereby varying a rate at which the preform is drawn through the passage by the suction.

2. (original) The molding method defined in claim 1 wherein the flow cross section is varied by displacing a valve element in the conduit between positions in which it differently blocks flow through the conduit.

3. (original) The molding method defined in claim 2, further comprising the step of admitting outside air to the conduit downstream of the valve element when pressure in the conduit downstream of the element drops below a predetermined level.

1 4. (original) The molding method defined in claim 1,
2 further comprising the steps of:

3 displacing the hollow preform toward the mold and into
4 the passage at a predetermined rate;

5 pinching off trailing and leading ends of the preform
6 when same are respectively at the output end and an intake end of
7 the passage;

8 inflating the preform after pinching-off its ends and
9 curing the preform.

1 5. (original) The molding method defined in claim 4,
2 further comprising the steps of:

3 opening the mold after curing the preform;

4 removing the cured preform from the open mold; and

5 reclosing the mold.

1 6. (currently amended) A molding apparatus comprising:
2 a closable mold forming when closed a nonstraight passage
3 having an intake end and an output end;
4 extruder means for forming a hollow plastic preform and
5 feeding it to the intake end of the passage;
6 a suction conduit having an upstream end connected to the
7 output end of the passage and a downstream end;
8 pump means connected to the downstream end of the conduit
9 for applying a generally constant suction thereto;
10 a valve element in the conduit intermediate its ends
11 movable for varying a flow cross section of the conduit; and
12 control means connected to the conduit and to the extrud-
13 er means for moving the valve element, [[and]] varying suction
14 applied through the conduit to the passage in accordance with a
15 position of the preform relative to the mold, and thereby varying a
16 rate at which the preform is drawn through the passage by the
17 suction.

1 7. (original) The molding apparatus defined in claim 6
2 wherein the valve element is pivotal in the conduit.

1 8. (original) The molding apparatus defined in claim 5,
2 further comprising
3 bypass means for introducing air into the conduit down-
4 stream of the element when pressure downstream of the element drops
5 below a predetermined level.

1 9. (original) The molding apparatus defined in claim 5
2 wherein the pump means has an output provided with a sound muffler.